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ABSTRACT

Multicultural studies often emphasize the need to diversify school curricula. There is a need for more varied representations of cultures in English teaching because the representations which teachers present heavily influence students' access to literacy. Many proponents of mainstreaming cultural diversity use liberal theories about cultural difference. However, assimilation and inclusion of minority cultures as the goal of cultural diversity and social change too narrowly define the difference between the circulation of cultures as an economic difference. In assimilating into discourses of economic and linguistic power, marginalized groups, including lesbian and gay alliances, risk estrangement from their culture and negation of their specific histories and oppression and their economic gains. The absence of gay and lesbian culture from the curriculum is a powerful testament to dominant ideologies' power to erase and obscure. Categories of identities become a sort of representational checklist to see how educators are doing--and categories of identities which include race, gender, and class are held as distinct from each other. Educators must use critical pedagogies providing new paradigms for radical social action which reconfigures dominant sets of ideologies and assumptions. The homogenization of multicultural studies is not something to be taken lightly. A lesbian and gay caucus dedicated to the complexity of diversity can provide a means of critiquing the ideologies which legislate assumptions about teaching and learning. (SG)

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NCTE:Lesbian and Gay Caucus
It's Not Just One in Ten:
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No Bread, No Butter::
Lesbian & Gay Critical & Cultural Theories or Multicultural Discussions in the Wonder Bread Factory

Multi-cultural studies often emphasize the need to diversify school curricula. What is this need? And how has it been incorporated into our schools? We say we need more, and varied, *representations* of cultures in English teaching because the representations of culture which we study, allow, and even sanction, in our classrooms heavily influence our students' access to literacy. Presumably, English classrooms are in the business of developing student literacies. The texts we write and read in English can withhold identification from students, and validate them at the same time. So, we have begun to ask: who has our English Studies program serviced?

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Educational theorists from Barbara Hernstein-Smith, Eve Sedgwick and Johnathon Kozol, to Julia Penelope, Donald Morton and Henry Louise Gates have begun re-charting the territorial boundaries of English to be more inclusive. Yet their

liberal theories about teaching cultural diversity encourage broader cultural representations in the belief that providing more students with better access to discourses of power will foster greater socio-economic equity. Leveling the playing field for social justice's sake calls for sweeping changes in the distribution of "representational air time" and of material goods. Liberal proponents of multicultural studies argue poignantly for a sort of radical-mainstreaming of under/privileged cultures. So, we have begun to supplement traditional and canonical literatures with culturally specific texts and a variety of English vernaculars with which to read and write.

Many proponents of mainstreaming cultural diversity use liberal theories about cultural difference. Yet in an effort to make the stories of marginalized groups visible, many multi-cultural theorists have neglected the profound ways cultures differ -- in their most basic assumptions and sets of ideologies. The liberal gaze of the educational institution pushes toward a utopian belief that *visibility grants inclusivity*. Sadly, though, assimilation and inclusion as the goal or end of a movement for cultural diversity and social change too narrowly defines the difference between the circulation of cultures as an economic difference. When cultural difference is reductively understood as an economic

lack, and a lack of access to power at that. An arguably more profound injustice emerges from multi-cultural discussions: assimilation as erasure.

For instance, Jonathan Kozol looks at the radical disparities in economic distribution of funds in American schools as telling powerful stories about the material conditions of students and schools. He compares today's severe racial divisions in New York City schools to the de-segregation riots in Mississippi Schools 23 years ago, Kozol says:

> All our children say the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. Whether in the New York suburbs, Mississippi, or the South Bronx, they salute the same flag. They place their hands across their hearts and join their voices in a tribute to "one nation indivisible" which promises liberty and justice to all people. What is the danger that the people in a town ... would face if they resolved to make this statement true? How much would it really harm their children to compete in a fair race? (p.132)

Fairness and difference: the dream of a fair playing ground is as enticing as the richness of culture. But in our desire for indivisibility, I think a lot of misunderstanding is possible.

The dangers for Lesbian and Gay alliances, particularly those which hope to quickly jump on the multi-cultural wagon, are many of the same risks marginalized folks within multicultural studies run into. When marginalized folks assimilate into discourses of economic and linguistic power, we risk estrangement from our culture, and the negation of our specific histories and our oppression, all to better the material conditions of our lives. We risk mis/appropriation. We risk dissolution of solidarity in our fight for entitlement. And we risk "regulating" our own oppression through the erasure of our differences.

Struggle *against* difference for the inclusion of minority texts is one of Eve Sedgewick's arguments. She says that academia is creating alternate canons in an attempt to "explode" the master canon which claims primacy over English studies. Texts displaying homo-erotic desire, says Sedgwick will disrupt the monolith of hetero-normative discourse (or traditional canons). Along with other minority canons, Lesbian and Gay texts (that's my ordering not Sedgwick's) will take the place of the monolithic canon regulating literary studies (p. 146). How lots of smaller canons will be less "masterful" or oppressive is unclear from Sedgewick's argument. Surely the ways we learn to *read*, think, and construct texts in Cultural studies classrooms will have

everything to do with the effects of our curricula. Scholarly folks who forward arguments about miniature canon making, ranging from conservative to moderate proponents of the Language Arts curriculum, use the wash of universality to understand narratives, and characters, in short, the subjects within the marginalized cultures which they encounter. This is what I am calling the wash of dominate hetero-normative discourses and ideologies. Understanding cultures as canons, theorizes cultural *difference* through the filter of identity -- a filter which sorts and selects the types of ideologies which will be permitted. This is a lack of critical understanding of difference. As I was saying earlier, the liberal/multicultural mis-understanding of culture displays a concern for the claims marginalized folks can and can not make on autonomy and on cultural validation. These liberal theories are grounded in specific understandings of the "self."

The "self" is understood as an empty set, filled by the categorical inscription of overlapping layers of cultural identities. Folks *become* the discursive markings cultures over-writting us like class/race/religion/sexual-identification/gender. Liberal theories of education, and certainly arguments for miniature canons, understand *difference* as identities read and evaluated through the lenses

of cultural catagories which are an alibi for better understandings of what diversity might mean. Assimilation can make difference perfunctory and polite. When ideological boundaries, divisions, and differences are erased, they are replaced by an edifice of identity distinctions which only give lip-service to the complexities of culture. Cultural studies can marginalize people.

For example, we speak of the Native American experience using anglo-European understanding's of the Sovereign Self which we've inherited from DesCartes. When a closer look at many of Native American cultures reveals a pervasive assumption of communiality. Yet, Native American cultures often get read into ways of speaking and meaning making which are readily available to "us" and comfortable. This is when the teaching of cultural diversity blurrs the ideological boundaries between cultures eliminating the diversity which we extoll.

The absence of Queer Culture from the context of our discussions, even when present in the voices of our texts, is a powerful testament to colonizing powers, the powers to erase and obscure, welded by dominant ideologies. Perhaps Trihn Mihn-Ha says it best, "Theory oppresses, when it wills or perpetuates existing power relations, when it presents itself as a means to exert authority -- the **Voice of Knowledge**." (p.

42) As students and teachers, we must take time to think about the reasons why marginalized cultures and texts aren't studied in classrooms. Discussing normative-heterosexism is integral to thinking about the alienation of Queer culture. The rules for language play and usage which schools enforce, and the vignettes traditional literature utilize sustain the mechanisms of heterocentrism. Texts can also help critique heterosexist norms/dominant norms (Anzaldua 170). Elaine Showalter says: what gets read, as well as how students are encouraged to read, contributes noticeably to the teaching of heterocentricism, so too must these factors strongly effect heterocentricism's un-teaching (p. 349).

The problem is that *homo*-normative educational movements like Queer theory are reinscribed into the ideological frameworks of English studies. In their essays on Feminism and Foucault, Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby say language binaries are partially at fault (p. 194). The moment our institutional gaze is brought upon what we teach and begins to make value judgements about how the substance of our teaching effects students, we read cultural exclusion and mandate inclusion. Catagories of identities become a sort of representational check list to see how we are doing. And while we are far from fulfilling the representational need, we hold categories of identities which include race, gender, and class as distinct

from each other. The separateness and opposition of thinking about identities through binaries maintains the integrity of identity categories at the expense of more effective metaphors for reading and critiquing. In fact, these ideological binaries become a form of social and cultural violence at the point of materialistic conscription.

When teaching texts follows the sway of normative heterosexuality, Queer studies is alienated. The lives and the minds of the students within the educational system are indoctrinated into a pernicious cultural fiction. The absence of Queer friendly discussions shrouds Lesbian and Gay cultures in mystery. Participating in Queer cultures can enrich, problematize, and enhance cultural awareness. Cultural affirmation provides access to vital ways of living, loving, and creating communities. As textual commodities, one culture need not have a greater value than another. The ability to evaluate the similarities and differences between cultures should play a large part in class discussions about texts. The <u>inclusion</u> of Lesbian and Gay cultures is absolutely necessary to break the silence of our exclusion, but simply being read, spoken, written and imagined is not sufficient.

We must use the critical pedagogies providing new paradigms for "radical" social action. By "radical" I mean inclusion

that drastically reconfigures "dominant" sets of ideologies and assumptions. Groups like Queer Nation have organized grass-roots outings to Malls where groups of drag-queens walk through malls together chanting things like "We're here, we're Queer, we're fabulous!" Their chants and gender-bending garb insist on foregrounding difference, and yet the cite of a shopping mall is chosen to insist on visibility even in a temple of hetero-normative mass culture. Similarly, Indiana University's Vagina Squad recently responded to a fraternity gang rape of an openly lesbian wommon by staging Kiss-Ins supplemented by pamphlets about date rape and carrying signs naming the offending fraternity. These "radical" outbursts may not seem at first directly applicable to the classroom, but I think they are.

I think the queer pedagogy of "acting out" provides powerful examples of how the cultural binaries can be rethought. However, the homogenization of multicultural studies is not something to be taken lightly. Surely, a Lesbian and Gay Caucus dedicated to the complexity of diversity has all the richness and potential to provide a place for critique of the ideologies which legislate our assumptions about teaching and learning.

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